

New Jersey Memorial Home
524 Northwest Boulevard
Vineland
Cumberland
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-979

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

NEW JERSEY MEMORIAL HOME

HABS No. NJ-979

Location: 524 Northwest Boulevard, Vineland, Cumberland County, New Jersey

USGS Millville, N. J. Quadrangle. Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.497670.4371540

Present Owner: State of New Jersey

Present Occupant: State of New Jersey

Present Use: Veterans Home

Significance: The New Jersey Memorial Home is emblematic of the State of New Jersey's efforts to provide for its veterans. New Jersey has continuously provided benefits to resident veterans since shortly after the end of the Civil War. Originally known as the New Jersey Home for Disabled Soldiers, Sailors or Marines and Their Wives, the New Jersey Memorial Home was the third veterans' home established in New Jersey. The Vineland facility opened in 1900, in response to the increasing number of aging Civil War veterans who required medical and long-term care facilities, as well as to an influx of Spanish-American War veterans. The facility has functioned as a veterans' home continuously since its opening.

The New Jersey Memorial Home is located at 524 Northwest Boulevard in Vineland, Cumberland County, New Jersey. The Home occupies a twenty-six acre site located on the west side of Northwest Boulevard. A semi-circular drive, lined with mature trees, provides access to the site from Northwest Boulevard. The Main Building is located at the midpoint of this drive, facing Northwest Boulevard across a wide expanse of lawn occupied by mature trees. The Main Building is the centerpiece and visual focal point of the site. Modern veterans' residences located west and southwest of the Main Building are reached by a road that branches off the entrance drive. To the west, at the rear of the site, is a grove of trees with picnic benches, and a cemetery.

The present site of the New Jersey Memorial Home was originally donated to the New Jersey Methodist Conference by Charles K. Landis, founder of Vineland. Landis established Vineland in 1861 as part real estate speculation and part utopian experiment. He sought to attract cultural and religious institutions to his community by substantial donations of land.¹

The New Jersey Conference proposed to erect a co-educational seminary, providing instruction to both day and boarding students, on the property donated by Landis. The Conference's architects, Wrotnowski and Holbrook, designed a four-story Second Empire style school building, the present central section of the Main Building, for the site. A local newspaper described the architectural plans in detail, noting its "lofty French roof," "spacious Cupola," and "fine Piazza."²

The Second Empire, a building style popular during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, became the favored style for government and institutional buildings. The design of the New Jersey Conference's Vineland school reflects the influence of James Renwick, Jr.'s Main Building at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. Renwick's design was widely published in both popular and professional journals. The influence of this design is also evident in a Vineland newspaper's call to turn Vineland "like Poughkeepsie, . . . [into] a City of Schools," since Poughkeepsie was not widely considered a bastion of education in the mid-nineteenth century.³

The New Jersey Methodist Conference dedicated their Vineland school building in November 1868. At that date the building's center section and north pavilion had been enclosed. Funds for completion of the remainder of the building failed to materialize, forcing the Conference to take out a mortgage on the property. These funds were also expended without completing the building, and the Conference lost the property, which was sold for back taxes. Ultimately, the

¹*Vineland Weekly*, 21 Nov. 1868.

²"The Schools of Vineland," *Vineland Weekly*, 19 Sept. 1868.

³*Ibid.*

mortgage was foreclosed upon, and the property passed to the holder of the mortgage.⁴

During the 1870s and 1880s the property passed through a succession of owners. In 1878, Reverend Thomas Conway attempted to establish an Inebriate Asylum in the building, but proved unable to attract funding for the idea. L. D. Farr acquired the building after foreclosure proceedings against Conway and outfitted the still incomplete building as an oil-cloth factory. Farr died in early 1883, prior to the opening of his factory, and in 1884 the Catholic Fathers of Mercy purchased the property from his estate with the intention of opening a college in the building.⁵

The Catholic Fathers finally completed the building, finishing the south pavilion and fitting out the interior. The building functioned as a seminary, the College of the Sacred Heart, from 1884 to ca. 1897, when financial difficulties forced the Catholic Fathers to close the school. An 1897 promotional publication on Vineland described the building as "unused," but noted that the state planned to turn the property into a home for veterans.⁶

The State of New Jersey had a long history of providing veterans' benefits to state residents. As early as 1831 the legislature allotted pensions to Revolutionary War veterans.⁷ In 1864, at the height of the Civil War, Governor Marcus L. Ward appointed a commission to investigate the possibility of establishing a Soldiers' Home for veterans. The commission recommended establishment of such an institution, and in 1866 the Home for Disabled Veterans opened outside of Newark. The twenty-three-acre site, leased for a five-year period, included several buildings formerly operated by the Ward U. S. General Hospital.⁸

In the late 1860s, following the federal government's establishment of National Homes for Civil War veterans, the state considered closing the Newark facility. But, in November 1870, Governor Theodore F. Randolph told the legislature that

⁴Thomas Cushing and Charles E. Sheppard, *History of the Counties of Gloucester, Salem, and Cumberland, New Jersey* (Philadelphia, 1883), 107.

⁵Ibid.; *Vineland: Its Products, Soil, Manufacturing Industries and Commercial Interests* (Vineland, 1888), 51, 61.

⁶D. O. Kellogg, *Illustrated Vineland* (Philadelphia, 1897), 32.

⁷James Leiby, *Charity and Correction in New Jersey: A History of State Welfare Institutions* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1967), 75.

⁸"New Jersey Home For Disabled Soldiers -- History" (n.d.), 1. TS on file at Office of the Executive Assistant, New Jersey Memorial Home, Vineland, New Jersey.

he had reversed his earlier decision and was determined to maintain the State Home because it provided facilities for disabled and destitute veterans near their family and friends. New Jersey was the only state in the Union to maintain a veterans' facility throughout the second half of the nineteenth century.

By the 1880s the expanding city of Newark had encroached upon the rural setting of the Soldiers' Home. The state legislature authorized construction of a new facility in Kearny, and in October 1888 the residents of the Newark facility were removed to their new quarters.⁹

As the Civil War veterans served by the Soldiers' Home grew older they required more care and additional services. The demands placed upon the Home's facilities exceeded the capacity of the physical plant and led to the appointment of legislative commissions that investigated the need for, and possible site of, new facilities. These commissions also considered the needs of veterans' wives and widows, who were unprovided for under the existing system. The increased demand placed upon the Soldiers' Home by aging veterans, and the desire to provide for veterans' wives and widows led, in 1898, to the purchase of the vacant Methodist Conference school building in Vineland. The state hired architect Thomas Stephen to oversee the remodeling and renovation of the building. Contractor William E. Allen completed this work, which included replacement of the floors and porches. Upon completion of the renovations the facility, known as the New Jersey Home for Disabled Soldiers, Sailors or Marines, and Their Wives, received its first residents in January 1900.¹⁰

Legislators intended the new home, run by a Board of Managers, to function as a residence for sick and homeless veterans and their wives, sparing these individuals the "disgrace of the almshouse."¹¹ The Board of Managers showed great concern with the economical operation of the Home, urging the legislature, in 1902, to approve the purchase of nine additional acres for use as vegetable gardens. The Board believed that growing vegetables at the site would prove less expensive than purchasing them from local farmers.¹²

Shortly after establishment of the Vineland facility the Board of Managers requested authorization from the state legislature to divide the building's large halls into small bedrooms to better accommodate the increasing numbers of

⁹Ibid., 2.

¹⁰*Report of the Board of Managers of the Home for Disabled Soldiers, Sailors or Marines, and Their Wives For the Year Ending October 31, 1900* (Trenton: n.p., 1900), 3. Hereafter cited as *Report* with appropriate date.

¹¹*Report* (1902), 3.

¹²*Report* (1903), 6.

veterans applying for admission to the Home.¹³ The legislature did not approve this proposal, but in 1903 funds were allocated for construction of an addition to the south end of the building. The addition, completed in 1904, closely conformed to the appearance of the original building through its use of similar masonry, roof lines, and fenestration patterns. A two-story porch extended across the south facade, and the southern half of the east facade, of the addition, which provided living space for veterans' wives.

Soon after completion of south wing the Board began lobbying the legislature for another new building or wing, as well as for a separate boiler house.¹⁴ In 1906 the legislature appropriated \$50,000 for construction of a north wing, identical in appearance to the south wing, and a boiler house.¹⁵ The appropriation apparently proved sufficient for construction of the new wing, but construction of the boiler house was deferred for lack of funds.¹⁶ An electric lighting and heating plant were finally completed in 1909.¹⁷

Throughout the first decades of the twentieth century the resident population of the facility grew steadily. The veterans' wives were removed from the Main Building to a two-story frame tenement building, located immediately west of the Main Building's south wing, ca. 1911. As the Home's population rose it became apparent that hospital facilities were required at the site. In 1907 a hospital ward was established, but by 1911 the Board began to call for construction of a separate hospital building.¹⁸ Ultimately, in 1914, a two-story hospital building was erected immediately north of the Main Building.¹⁹ In 1924 the entire hospital was remodeled, bringing the building into compliance with current health and fire safety standards.²⁰

Throughout the first decades of the twentieth century, as the population of the Home continued to grow, additional buildings were erected on the property. Many of these buildings reflected the Board of Managers' continued interest in making

¹³Report (1900), 6.

¹⁴Report (1905), 4.

¹⁵Report (1906), 4.

¹⁶Report (1907), 4.

¹⁷Report (1909), 3.

¹⁸Report (1907), 4.

¹⁹Report (1914), 3.

²⁰Report (1924), 7.

the facility as self-sufficient as possible. By 1912 the grounds included a chicken coop, a pig pen, and a creamery.²¹

Between 1912 and 1919 residents built approximately two dozen cottages, which served as living quarters, on the grounds. In 1921 the cottages, many occupied by unmarried couples, became the subject of a newspaper exposé, which dubbed them "Love Nests." As a result, the Board of Managers banned use of the cottages by single men and women.²² By 1925 most of the cottages had been removed from the grounds. In 1925 a brick residence for the Home's superintendent was erected south of the Main Building, facing Northwest Boulevard.²³

The population of the New Jersey Memorial Home peaked between 1916 and 1918 and then entered a long period of decline. The drop in resident population largely stemmed from the fact that Civil War veterans, the largest resident group at the facility, had reached old age and were dying at a more rapid rate than previously.²⁴ The size of the resident population grew during the Depression era, as indigent veterans sought relief at the state facility, but the overall population trend continued downward.

As the facility's population aged, and declined, efforts were made by the Board of Managers to maintain standards of care. These efforts included a variety of alterations and renovations to the facility's aging physical plant intended to eliminate fire hazards, provide modern facilities, and assure that the building conformed to current health, fire, and safety codes. Interior alterations included provision of fire doors, elimination of original open stairs, replacement of wooden wainscoting with lath and plaster, and provision of improved bathroom facilities.

An extensive program of exterior renovation occurred simultaneously with the interior alterations. Exterior work performed between 1920 and 1950 included construction of fire-proof stair towers, removal of the *porte cochere* in 1941, removal of the entry stairs to the south wing in 1943, construction of a new main entry hall and stairs in 1946, and a major renovation effort in 1947-1948 that resulted in the removal of the third floor porch on the east facade, replacement of the second and third story porch doors with windows, and removal of the first story porch roof at the north facade. In 1949 the main entry doors were replaced

²¹The Sanborn Fire Insurance Co., *Vineland, N. J., 1912*, Microfilm on file at New Jersey State Library, Trenton.

²² McCresson, "Fifty Odd Years," Chapter 4.

²³Ibid., Chapter 11-A.

²⁴Report (1921-1924), 5.

by a picture window installation, and in 1950 new exterior fire escapes were installed on the west facade.²⁵

Despite these maintenance efforts, the Main Building became progressively more deteriorated during the middle decades of the twentieth century. The condition of the building became so bad that officials were required to relocate all patients in the building to other facilities in 1980. At present the Main Building houses administrative offices on the first floor and recreational facilities, such as a library and craft rooms on the ground floor. The upper floors of the building are vacant and abandoned.

²⁵McCresson, "Fifty Odd Years," Chap. 13, *Report* (1942); *Ibid.* (1946); *Ibid.* (1949); *Ibid.* (1951).

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